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Walter Scott in Comics

Christopher Murray

There is a long history of visual interpretations and adaptations of Walter Scott's writings. From illustrations and frontispieces, to chapbooks, paintings interpreting scenes from the stories, theatrical performances, illustrated children's editions, and, eventually, film adaptations, these remediations of Scott's work have informed and influenced one another.¹ In her article "The Illustration of Sir Walter Scott: Nineteenth-Century Enthusiasm and Adaptation" (1971), Catherine Gordon observes that hundreds of painters and sculptors produced and exhibited over a thousand works inspired by Scott at the Royal Academy and British Institution, and what she refers to as "Scott mania" resulted in Minton and Wedgwood producing Scott inspired pottery, while publishers produced illustrated editions, travel guides and other items that served the public's interest in Scott.² As Alison Lumsden succinctly puts it, "Scott caught the imagination of illustrative artists", and this continued throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.³ However, despite the vitality of Scott's writing, and his intense interest in collecting chapbooks, many of which were accompanied by woodcut style illustrations, Scott's novels were not initially accompanied by visual interpretations of his stories. Strangely,

¹ See Richard J. Hill, *Picturing Scotland Through the Waverley Novels: Walter Scott and the Origins of the Victorian Illustrated Novel* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

² Catherine Gordon, "The Illustration of Sir Walter Scott: Nineteenth-Century Enthusiasm and Adaptation", *The Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute* 34 (1971): 297-317 (p. 297).

³ Alison Lumsden, "Walter Scott was no bland tartan romantic, he was dumbed down", *The Conversation*, July 9th 2014, <https://theconversation.com/walter-scott-was-no-bland-tartan-romantic-he-was-dumbed-down-28933> (accessed 09/05/18).

ome have viewed this as an indication that Scott placed little value on the visual arts. J. R. Harvey makes this point in *Victorian Novelists and Their Illustrators* (1970),

None of his Waverley novels had any pictures when they first came out, though various collected editions had vignettes and frontispieces. As Scott had wanted to be a painter in his youth [...] one might have expected him to be interested in illustration for its own sake. But he was interested only if the pictures helped make the money he needed so badly.⁴

More recent scholarship, notably Richard J. Hill's *Picturing Scotland Through the Waverley Novels: Walter Scott and the Origins of the Victorian Illustrated Novel* (2010), challenges this view. Hill argues that Scott believed that illustrations were important but was also very cautious about how his work was positioned in the marketplace. He was picky, rather than hostile to the visual arts. Hill notes,

As much as Scott wanted to entertain his readership, he also had a pedagogical agenda; his historical novels collapse the Romantic with the antiquarian, and he required any illustration of his fiction to attempt to achieve the same objective. Scott's understanding of the role of illustration, and his insistence on a certain type of illustration to his novels, paved the way for their more famous Victorian successors. Contrary to popular opinion, Scott was not averse to having his novels

⁴ J. R. Harvey, *Victorian Novelists and Their Illustrators* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1970), p. 8.

illustrated [...] Scott was concerned, however, that artists illustrating his work should adhere to his own preconceptions of artistic ‘excellence’. Only a handful of artists ever received Scott’s total trust as illustrators.⁵

This more nuanced view of Scott is supported by Kathryn Sutherland, who argues that Scott thought of his role as an author in terms of a complex relationship between producer and consumer.⁶ He conceived of his readership as alert to subtleties of meaning, but still in need of various forms of education which his writings could provide. In this respect his collapsing of narrative and history was ideological, even paternalistic, and his attitude towards illustration was equally so. The images could not simply decorate interest; they needed to educate.

The huge, unprecedented popularity of Scott’s writing fed a demand for material that complemented and extended the reach and meaning of his work. Paintings of scenes from Scott’s novels have received a significant amount of scholarly attention, and in particular those by the likes of J. M. W. Turner. The illustrations, paintings, plays, and films produced in response to Scott’s novels have also drawn critical interest, but one aspect of the relationship between Scott’s work and visual culture remains relatively undocumented – Walter Scott in comics and graphic novels.

⁵ Hill, *Picturing Scotland Through the Waverley Novels*, p. 1.

⁶ Kathryn Sutherland, ‘Fictional Economies: Adam Smith, Walter Scott and the Nineteenth-Century Novel’, *ELH* 54.1 (1987): 97-127.

It is easy to imagine why Scott might present a challenge to creators and publishers of comics. Many of the novels are long and do not easily lend themselves to the kind of extreme editing and abridgement required by the translation of the narrative into a comic (which might typically be around thirty to fifty pages, or perhaps twice that for a graphic novel). Similarly, Scott's (unfair) reputation as being unfashionable and lacking relevance to modern readers might make comic adaptations of his work a hard sell to both readers and publishers. However, the evidence seems to be to the contrary. There are a surprising number of comics that have adapted Scott's writings, and he was a favourite of the famous *Classics Illustrated* line of literature to comics adaptations which first appeared in the 1940s and remain in print to this day. This is undoubtedly due, in part, to the appeal of the stories, which persisted even after critical appreciation of Scott shifted in the early twentieth century. As Lumsden observes, "By the end of the 19th century, Scott was near compulsory reading in schools and in many ways his fall from favour was secure. Reconstructed as an author purveying sound values for children in the age of empire, Scott seemed to offer little to the modernists of the early 20th century".⁷ Nevertheless, Scott's work remained in the public imagination, and this was bolstered by the advent of film and comics adaptations. That said, as the academic field of Comics Studies has emerged over the last several decades a growing body of scholarship has appeared that addresses the relationship between literature and comics, though little of it has focused on the many comics adaptations of Scott. This article will briefly discuss the relationship between comics and literature before examining various adaptations of Scott's stories in comics before correlating these comics with Scott's attitude towards visual responses to his work.

⁷ Lumsden, "Walter Scott was no bland tartan romantic, he was dumbed down".

Comics and Literature

Comics have had a long and complex relationship with literature. The medium of comics, usually understood as a sequential arrangement of images contained within a structure of panels and often accompanied by text, emerged in parallel with the development of literary fiction and the publishing industry that supported it. While there is no clear agreement among comics scholars on the exact definition and origin point of the medium, comics evolved into their current form largely through the advent of mass printing, appearing in national and regional newspapers and magazines in the nineteenth century. They also drew something from the tradition of political prints and visual satire best exemplified by the likes of Hogarth and Gillray. When comic books became widely popular in the 1930s they offered a huge range of subject matter for diverse readerships. In Britain and America in particular the association of comics with a young readership became cemented, and questions started to be asked about the effect of such material on young readers. This suspicion echoed the concerns about Penny Dreadfuls in the mid-nineteenth century, and prefigured concerns about rock music, video nasties and computer games in the years to come. Concerns about the negative educational value of comics resulted in Senate Hearings and self-imposed industry censorship in America in the mid-1950s, and the *Harmful Publications Act* (1955) in Britain. Some publishers sought to elevate themselves above the superheroes, Westerns and talking animal comics that had come to dominate the industry, instead offering more “respectable” and educational material, in the form of adaptations of canonical literature. The most famous example of this is the *Classics Illustrated* line, published by Gilberton Company Inc from 1942 to 1971, but there were several others, including Amalgamated Press’s *Thriller*

Comics, with its “Told in Pictures” series, which appeared in Britain in the early 1950s and ran for an impressive 450 issues, ending in 1963; the 12 issues series *A Classic in Pictures*, which was published in Britain in the early 1950s; and the Marvel’s Classic Comics line in the 1970s, as well as several others.

What would become *Classics Illustrated* was launched in 1941 by Albert Kanter, a Russian entrepreneur whose family had moved to the United States in 1904. Kanter founded Gilberton and set about publishing a series called *Classic Comics*, which changed its name to *Classics Illustrated* in 1947. Kanter’s aim was to give children the opportunity to encounter great works of literature in an accessible and appealing form, which he hoped would improve their literacy and inspire them to read more widely. To this end, the comics often contained short essays about the writers and their works at the back of the comic, thereby encouraging the readers to learn more and perhaps even to seek out the original texts. At the end of each story there is a caption that states “Now that you have read the *Classics Illustrated* edition, don’t miss the added enjoyment of reading the original, obtainable at your school or public library”. This statement is important as the educational system that *Classics Illustrated* tried to establish positioned the comic as an accessible way of intriguing a reader, of priming them to encounter the original text. This was intended to be of benefit to young readers who might be daunted by a literary classic, or else a reader learning to speak English. The crucial element is that the comic is not conceived of in isolation from, but rather in dialogue with, the original text. William B. Jones Jr., author of a study of *Classics Illustrated*, argues that “*Classics Illustrated*, in effect, established a literary canon for its young readership that to some degree mirrored the canon endorsed by high school and college English departments and that reflected the

cultural assumptions of the period”.⁸ The original *Classics Illustrated* series produced five adaptations of stories by Walter Scott, including *Ivanhoe*, *Rob Roy*, *The Talisman*, *The Lady of the Lake*, and *Castle Dangerous*. Jones Jr. notes that the release, or re-release of certain *Classics Illustrated* titles, were timed to correspond with the start of the school year. Kanter and the editors at Gilberton were almost as careful as Scott regarding the educational value of their titles, and their placement within the marketplace.

Classics Illustrated was reprinted all over the world. However, there were other comics publishers who were producing adaptations from literature. In Britain, Amalgamated Press led the way with several literature inspired strips featured in comics such as *Knockout*, *Sun* and *Comet* from the early 1940s onwards. Many of these stories were later reprinted in *Thriller Comics*, which also presented original content, under the banner “Told in Pictures”. This comic, which was later renamed *Thriller Comics Library*, first appeared in 1951 in the smaller digest format (which was closer in size to a paperback book) and with 64 pages of story. The series, which ran until 1963, mainly featured historical adventure, with Robin Hood and Dick Turpin being recurring favourites, but several issues also presented adaptations of literature to comics, in particular *The Three Musketeers*. These comics came in black and white, and each page typically had two or three panels (which meant that although these comics had more pages than *Classics Illustrated* the overall number of panels in each format was roughly comparable).

While a cynic might argue that children would be tempted to read solely the comic adaptations presented in *Classics Illustrated* or *Thriller Comics*, rather than the original,

⁸ William B. Jones Jr., *Classics Illustrated: A Cultural History*, 2nd edition (Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2011), p. 137.

Stephen E. Tabachnuck and Esther Bendit Saltzman note in the introduction to their edited collection *Drawn from the Classics: Essays on Graphic Adaptations of Literary Work* (2015) that “[comics] adaptations, when studied alongside their adapted texts, provide unique opportunities for understanding those texts more fully, as well as offering a unique reading experience in themselves”.⁹ This is certainly true for many of the adaptations of Scott’s stories into comics, and certainly those in the *Classics Illustrated* line, and the adaptations presented in the British *Thriller Comics*. Here was an echo of Scott’s belief that illustrations and visual responses to his work had the same responsibility to educate as his text. Whether or not Scott would have approved of how his work was being represented in the comics is not the point, as he set an extremely high bar on aesthetic quality. Rather, the aim of the comics to educate, and to drive readers towards the original literary texts, is arguably an extension of Scott’s attitude towards the role of visual art in relation to his work.

Ivanhoe

An adaptation of *Ivanhoe* appeared in the second issue of the original *Classics Illustrated* run in 1941, with an impressive cover by Gilberton’s art director, Martin Kildare (Fig. 1). The interior artwork by Edd Ashe and Ray Ramsey did not live up to the promise of the cover and was rather simplistic, with the air of a fairy tale in places. A combination of stiff postures, minimalist backgrounds, pedestrian composition, and the basic colour scheme made this a rather uninspiring adaptation. Ashe and Ramsey may, in fact, only have drawn some of the issue, and the overall rushed feeling of the issue suggests that racing towards a deadline to get the second issue ready may have contributed to this being

⁹ Stephen E. Tabachnuck, and Esther Bendit Saltzman (eds), *Drawn from the Classics: Essays on Graphic Adaptations of Literary Work* (Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2015), p. 4.

a rather disappointing effort. The script writer also clearly struggled with managing to compress the story as there are several elements of the storytelling, besides the art, that do not work.¹⁰ However, despite its deficiencies, this comic followed the educational principles set out at Gilberton. One might have needed to read the original in order to figure out what exactly was going on, but certain sequences, including the joust, come off well. This issue also featured a biography of Scott in the back pages. As William B. Jones Jr. recalls,

In keeping with Albert Kanter's insistence on the educational role of *Classics Illustrated*, extra pages at the end of each issue were devoted to informative articles [...] From issue No. 1 onward, a biography of the author accompanied the adaptation [which, were, for the most part] accurate and occasionally entertaining. Sir Walter Scott's embarrassing and painful mishap with George IV's brandy glass was duly recorded.¹¹

As sometimes happened with titles in the *Classics Illustrated* range, *Ivanhoe* was substantially reworked, and given the problems with the 1941 version, it was clear that this reworking was needed here. The revised version was released in 1954 with new artwork by Norman Nodel. This became the best-selling issue of the whole series. Indeed, the 1954 reinterpretation is widely regarded as one of the best comics in the *Classics Illustrated* line (Fig. 2). This reworking may have been prompted by the 1952 film *Ivanhoe*, directed by Richard Thorpe and distributed by MGM. This film was

¹⁰ Jones Jr., *Classics Illustrated*, p. 19.

¹¹ Jones Jr., *Classics Illustrated*, p. 137.

accompanied by a comic released by Fawcett Publications, but in this instance the comic was an adaptation of the film rather than the novel. This appeared in *Fawcett Movie Comics* #20 (1952), with a script by Leo Dorfman (later to become one of the most prolific writers of Superman comics in the 1960s).¹² Fawcett's version of the story, drawing directly on the visuals of the film, was much more dynamic than the *Classics Illustrated*'s original treatment of the novel, which may have impelled the reworking by Nodel. The Fawcett comic is well-executed, although the artist was clearly under instruction to make the film's stars, such as Elizabeth Taylor, recognisable. Nodel's reworking of the *Classics Illustrated* version adds memorable detail to key sequences, like the tournament and the siege of the castle. As the *Classics Illustrated* comics were substantially longer than other comics of the time (Nodel's *Ivanhoe* is 47 pages compared to the 33 pages of story in the Fawcett comic), there was scope to expand the dramatic scenes, sometimes using full page illustrations. As Jones Jr. argues,

[Nodel] was light-years ahead in technique [and] invested the various characters with well-observed personality distinctions, animating even the rather passive nominal here. A particular triumph was Rebecca, who loved *Ivanhoe* but was pursued by Bois-Guilbert, Nodel remarked that, as a Jewish illustrator, he particularly enjoyed his work on the self-sufficient Jewish heroine, one of Scott's most appealing female characters. The confrontation scene between Rebecca and the Norman Templar is one of the strongest sequences in the 1957 revision. In

¹² One of the curiosities of the comic is that even though the screenwriter Marguerite Roberts was removed from the film's credits after she was blacklisted for refusing to testify in HUAC hearings, her name appears on the front page of the comic, indicating her role as screenwriter for the film, alongside fellow writer Noel Langley.

Ivanhoe, Nodel perfected his closeup character studies and also displayed his flair for historical detail, from weaponry to falconry.¹³

This interest in historical detail is sometimes at the expense of fidelity to Scott's narrative, as in one sequence Nodel puts part of the Bayeux Tapestry in the background (when de Bracy rather aggressively courts Rowena). There is no reference to the Bayeux Tapestry in Scott's novel, but Nodel's use of it underscores the themes of the novel; and portions of the tapestry are clearly recognizable in the comic panels, demonstrating that Nodel carefully researched this sequence.

The success of *Classics Illustrated* prompted several imitators. In Britain this came in the form of a series of comics adapting literary texts that was called "A Classic in Pictures", published by Amex Co. Ltd, which was based in London, and *Thriller Comics*, published by Amalgamated Press. In an echo of *Classics Illustrated*, the second issue of *A Classic in Pictures* was a 1949 adaption of *Ivanhoe* (Fig. 3). The design of the covers owes much to *Classics Illustrated*, as does the format (there are 48 pages, and the back cover contains a portrait of Scott and some detail about the author and the novel). In keeping with many British comics of the time, the stories do not appear in full colour but rather use a spot colour, in this case red, to provide some variety and atmosphere (Fig. 4). This comic is also the exact same size as the 1940s *Classics Illustrated* comics, which is telling as British comics were usually larger than American comics. In the 1940s, some

¹³ Jones Jr., *Classics Illustrated*, p. 155.

British comics experimented with the American size, largely because the importation of American comics had been banned due to the war effort, and remained restricted long after the war, in order to protect the British publishing industry. However, American comics, which had been much more readily available before the war, were seen as glamorous and desirable, so some British publishers mimicked this format.¹⁴ The *A Classic in Pictures* version of *Ivanhoe*, with its dynamic, colourful cover, is clearly meant to evoke the style of American comics, taking advantage of the fact that American comics were highly sought after and hard to come by at this time. The interior artwork is quite different from what is suggested on the cover, however. Visually it is a striking adaptation, with a strong degree of historical accuracy and more grit than the original *Classics Illustrated* edition (Nodel's reworking and the Fawcett version were yet to be produced). *A Classic in Pictures* is now largely forgotten, and because the company produced only twelve issues, was nowhere near as popular as *Classics Illustrated*. But these comics are comparable in quality to *Classics Illustrated*, and in some ways superior. The word balloons and captions were a little heavy-handed, but the artwork was strong – and in the case of their *Ivanhoe*, atmospheric and highly effective. This was followed a few years later by *Thriller Comics* #29 (1952, artist unknown), which featured an adaptation of *Ivanhoe* (Fig. 5). This comic has a striking painted cover, but as was common in British digest-sized comics, the interior artwork was in black and white. In places this artwork echoes the style of the illustrations seen in the 1871 edition of *Ivanhoe*, with their scratchy cartoon-style linework. Some of the panels in the comic also recall medieval woodcuts, while other panels draw influence from etchings, which suggests that

¹⁴ Christopher Murray, *The British Superhero* (Jackson MS: Mississippi University Press, 2017), pp. 73-75.

the artist of *Thriller Comics* #29 was perhaps looking at illustrated versions of the novel for inspiration.

Another American version of *Ivanhoe* appeared in 1963, published by Dell. John Lehti produced the interior artwork (Fig. 6). The striking cover art, with its bold yellow background and red title, evoke the pop-art style of many early 1960s comics, but this is contrasted with the painted artwork of the horse and central figures in combat. The clash on the cover is not merely that of men-at-arms, but of old and new traditions, with the painted artwork recalling nineteenth-century narrative paintings, and the design elements and colour scheme reflecting a modern sensibility. This clash of old and new is a recurring theme in Scott's work, as is the repurposing of stories and styles. This aesthetic is echoed by the fact that Lehti's artwork in the Dell comic is clearly influenced by Nodel's work in *Classics Illustrated's* reworked version of *Ivanhoe*, released nine years earlier; however, Lehti was an extremely talented artist in his own right and brought a certain energy and vigour, particularly to the battle scenes. In some panels parallel lines suggest shade or texture, but also recall the style of etchings, such as those seen in illustrated versions of Scott's work, which is not a technique employed by Nodel, although it is utilised by the artist of *Thriller Comics* #29 (1952, discussed above).

In 1979, King Features Syndicate produced a version of *Ivanhoe* under the banners "King Classics" and "Illustrated Classics". This was issue 15 in the series and was adapted by Dr Marion Kimberly, a professor of education. The series was designed as a teaching aid, and accompanied by "motivational posters, teacher's guides, exercises,

lesson plans, and dramatizations on cassette tapes, for use in the classroom”.¹⁵ As with *Classics Illustrated* comics there appeared biographical information about Scott, but the surrounding educational material was much more substantial than that offered by *Classics Illustrated*. The comic itself is a curiosity, in that it looks more like a compilation of newspaper strips, with little variety of panel shape or composition. This is perhaps unsurprising, as King Features Syndicate was known for newspaper strips. Also, the text is in a typeface with a mixture of small and capital letters, rather than all capitals, as is common in comics. These decisions likely reflected Kimberly’s attempt to make the process of reading the comics clear for the reader, but it does result in a slightly odd-looking comic that does not fully exploit the dramatic potential of the medium.

Ivanhoe, the most revisited of Scott’s works in comics, was again adapted for a striking Marvel Comics adaptation in 1976. This version was published under the banner “Marvel Classic Comics”, which appeared five years after the first run of *Classics Illustrated* came to an end in 1971. As the cover promises, the comic will deliver “The thrills and excitement of the original classic – in a powerful, never-before-seen comics version”. The emphasis is on the energy and dynamism associated with Marvel Comics, as opposed to what was now seen as the quaintness of *Classics Illustrated*. The Marvel *Ivanhoe* was written by Doug Moench, and illustrated by Jess Jodloman, a comics artist from the Philippines with a background in horror comics. This comic is one of the most visually accomplished comics adaptations of Scott’s work (Fig. 7 and 8). Jess Jodloman’s

¹⁵ M. Thomas Inge, “From Ahab to Peg-Leg Pete: A Comic Cetology”, in *Comics and Culture: Analytical and Theoretical Approaches to Comics*, ed. Anne Magnussen and Hans-Christian Christiansen (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2000), pp.157 -176 (p.161).

style evokes the best of the *Classics Illustrated* tradition but offers much more sophistication in the pacing and composition. This higher quality is most evident in the action sequences, but even smaller, intimate moments of character interaction are handled with subtlety, although this is not communicated very effectively by the cover by Gil Kane (imitating Jack Kirby), which instead evokes the successful Conan comics that Marvel was producing at the time. However, the scripting and interior artwork of this comic offers a superior example of adaptation of literature into comics in terms of the pacing, script and artwork.

The *Classics Illustrated* line was revived in 1991 with a series of prestige format graphic novels in response to a surge in popularity of comics for older readers. The series was extremely well-designed, with high production values, as a result of employing some of the most highly regarded comics creators of the time. Not aimed at a young readership, this series appealed to readers with fond memories of the earlier *Classics Illustrated* series but who now expected darker stories with more sophisticated artwork. Issue 25 in this series was a version of *Ivanhoe* by Mark Wayne Harris and Ray Lago (Fig. 9). As William B. Jones Jr. notes, Lago “used watercolours to add richness and depth to Sir Walter Scott’s medieval pageant. Each panel is exquisitely composed, with colors and detailed or minimal backgrounds perfectly underscoring the accompanying text [...] while the costuming, in keeping with the historical Romanticism of the novel, is solidly in the Romantic vein”.¹⁶ Among other adaptations of Scott, this version of *Ivanhoe* is quite unlike anything that preceded it. However, for all that, it is a rather lifeless adaptation. The power of the cover, which looks like an oil painting, is not captured in the interior

¹⁶ Jones Jr., *Classics Illustrated*, p. 289.

artwork, where the watercolours add a dreamy, insubstantial feel. This artistic disconnect is most jarring in the battle scenes which lack weight and do not communicate the required sense of chaos and violence. For all of its high production values, the earlier comics adaptations of *Ivanhoe* are much more successful than this version, in this regard. More recently, in 2009, French publisher Delcourt released a version of *Ivanhoe* written by Yann, with art and colouring by Elias Sanchez (Fig. 10). The artwork combines European and Manga (Japanese) comic styles, and is digitally “painted and the composition and artwork have much more power and dynamism than Lago’s version. This very well-produced version of *Ivanhoe*, spread over three volumes, is a rare instance of a recent adaptation of Scott into comics, although at the moment it has not yet been translated into English.

The Lady of the Lake

Following the success of the *Classics Illustrated* adaptation of *Ivanhoe*, *The Lady of the Lake* appeared in *Classics Illustrated* #75 (September 1950), written by George D. Lipscomb, and drawn by Henry C. Keifer, who was in many ways the definitive *Classics Illustrated* artist, one who helped to define the company’s house style. This adaptation, however, had actually first appeared in the *New York Post*’s comics supplement in 1948, and was syndicated across seven other newspapers. Such an initiative was launched in January 1947 under the banner “Illustrated Classics”, the same month and year that Gilbertson changed the name of the series from *Classic Comics* to *Illustrated Classics*. The adaptations created for the newspaper supplements each ran for four weeks, and there were fourteen adaptations in total, of which *The Lady in the Lake* was one. The newspaper stories were, when complete, longer than the monthly comics, so when they came to be

published as part of the main series, in comics form, they had to be edited and slightly reworked.¹⁷ The challenge for the writer in this issue was how to balance the narrative with retaining elements of the poem. As a caption on the first page signals, the aim is to present the story “in the matchless verse of Sir Walter Scott”. The solution is to intersperse the visual presentation of scenes from the story with caption boxes that present excerpts from the poem. In some instances, where the poem presents direct speech, the characters speak lines from the poem in word balloons (Fig. 11). The efforts taken to retain elements of the poem in the telling of the story make for an unusual rhythm, but to the credit of Lipscomb and Keifer, this format works well. One consequence of keeping so much of the poem intact is that Lipscomb frequently has to offer a footnote to gloss the meaning of certain words. If the aim had not been to retain the original language such words might have otherwise been changed for ease of comprehension. As a result, the adaptation of *The Lady of the Lake* is one of the most interesting and unusual adaptations of Scott produced by *Classics Illustrated*, and serves an educational function in its telling of the story, offering not just a visualisation of the narrative but also some explanatory notes, reflecting the mission of this series – to educate as well as to entertain. Also, the visual communication of the story is designed to accommodate the balance between various types of narration, from the poetry, presented in both captions and word balloons to, very occasionally, other captions, which inform the reader what has happened when parts of the poem are elided. The result is a comic that feels like it retains a good deal of the original author’s narrative “voice”, more so than most comics adaptations from canonical literature.

¹⁷ Jones Jr., *Classics Illustrated*, pp. 91-92.

The Talisman

Keifer returned to Scott in *Classics Illustrated* #111 (September 1953) with an adaptation of *The Talisman*, written by Kenneth W. Fitch (Fig. 12). This was to be Keifer's last work for *Classics Illustrated*. When Seaboard Publication, a rival to Gilberton, appeared, Keifer took commissions from them, creating a rift between the artist and Albert Kanter, the publisher of *Classics Illustrated*. This proved to be a major loss to the company. Having a background as a Shakespearean actor (and an unusual style – he spoke in normal conversations as if on the stage, and routinely wore a cape, presenting himself as aristocratic), Keifer brought a theatricality to his art, as well as a strong sense of historical accuracy, as he sometimes used stage props as inspiration for the drawings.¹⁸ Though *The Talisman* is not his best work, it, like others he produced for *Classics Illustrated*, had something of Scott's collapsing of history and fiction, or in this case, drama. He also took advantage of his skill for drawing historically accurate comics by counterpointing it, very occasionally, with a supernatural otherness, which evoked the infamous horror comics of the time. However, as William B. Jones Jr. argues, "Kiefer's illustrations appear to be less in the comics mold than a continuation of the tradition of 19th century book or magazine illustration", which was a tradition considerably influenced by the popularity of Scott's novels and their illustrations.¹⁹ *The Talisman* also featured in *Thriller Comics* #59 in Britain, appearing just before the *Classics Illustrated* version. Like the *Thriller Comics* version of *Ivanhoe*, this black-and-white comic was somewhat darker in tone (as well as in the visuals) than the American versions, and in this case, the artwork has been rendered to look very much like the illustrations that accompanied early editions of Scott's work.

¹⁸ Jones Jr., *Classics Illustrated*, pp. 64-67.

¹⁹ Jones Jr., *Classics Illustrated*, p. 67.

Rob Roy

The next adaptation of Scott in the *Classics Illustrated* line was *Rob Roy*, which appeared in *Classics Illustrated* #112 (April 1954). The artwork by Rudy Palais was quite different from Keifer's style. Palais was more of a stylist than Keifer, and his almost pop-art version of *Rob Roy* was created to cash in on the release of the Disney film *Rob Roy: The Highland Rogue*, which was released the previous year. A comic published by Dell (which had the license to produce comics for Disney), was released to accompany the film with art by Russ Manning. The Dell version was, like the Fawcett version of *Ivanhoe*, designed to recall the film, but the *Classics Illustrated Rob Roy* is much stranger (Fig. 13). It is full of Palais's trademark pop-art styling, and uses some unusual angles in the composition and perspective, making this feel rather modern in places. Indeed, at times Palais's work had more in common with a superhero comic of the time than other comics from the *Classics Illustrated* range, but this was no bad thing, injecting a degree of dynamism and power to the comics. However, halfway through the creation of the comic Palais fell ill and turned the task over to his brother, Walter Palais, whose contribution, as William B. Jones Jr. notes, "resulted in pallid imitation".²⁰ The first half of the book is full of truly strange images that undercut, or possibly subvert, the realism of Scott's portrayal of Scottish life at the time, but in some respects, the elements of the uncanny and a sense of unease introduced by Palais's artwork responds to the Gothic undercurrent in Scott's writing. The British comic *Thrilling Hero* (Man's World Comics, 1953), offered a quite different account of the life of Rob Roy, but is carried off with some humour. The black-and-white artwork is signed G. Vernon Stokes. It has not been verified

²⁰ Jones Jr., *Classics Illustrated*, p. 110.

whether this is the same artist as the renowned painter and printmaker of the same name, who died in 1954. Rob Roy also appears in several issues of the British *Thriller Comics* (appearing in issues 86, 113, 125, 165, 176, and 184), but there was little of Scott in these Rob Roy stories. Similarly, while the many issues featuring Robin Hood undoubtedly owed something to Scott, as most modern interpretations of the character do, this influence was of a more general sort, since these stories were not in fact direct adaptations of Scott's work.

Castle Dangerous

The British publication *Thriller Comics*, which, as noted above, produced adaptations of *Ivanhoe* and *The Talisman* in black-and-white digest format, also produced an adaptation of *Castle Dangerous* (Fig. 14). This appeared in *Thriller Comics* #36 (1952), and seems to have been drawn by the same artist who would later work on *The Talisman* in the same series (discussed above). *Castle Dangerous* was the last example of an adaptation of Scott in the original *Classics Illustrated* series, and appeared in *Classics Illustrated* #141 (November 1957), with artwork by Stan Campbell (Fig. 15 and 16). William B. Jones Jr. calls this novel “an inferior example of the author’s fiction, in which his imaginative powers frequently appeared to fail him, the book nevertheless translated exceptionally well into the stripped-down comics medium, demonstrating once again the principle that lesser works had less to lose in 45-page adaptations”.²¹ In some ways *Castle Dangerous* and *The Talisman* are strange choices, or at least, no means obvious ones. They are not the most famous or successful of Scott’s novels, but they offered the opportunity to

²¹ Jones Jr., *Classics Illustrated*, p. 204.

explore the same themes and scenes of medieval combat and high drama that had proved so successful in adaptations of *Ivanhoe*. Jones Jr. also notes that Campbell's "superbly rendered character studies of the disguised heroine, her minstrel protector, and the 'Black Douglas', as well as his carefully wrought depictions of armour, mail, and arms, made this one of the handsomest of the later Classics titles. The detailed drawings bear witness both to the artist's skills at recreating a historical era and to Roberta Strauss Feuerlicht's emphasis on period research".²² Feuerlicht was an historian who became an assistant editor at, then later Editor-in-Chief of, *Classics Illustrated*.

Perhaps one of the reasons why Scott has been largely overlooked in later graphic adaptations is that several of the authors whose work has been repeatedly adapted into comics are those, like Shakespeare, whose work remains an unshakable part of high school and University curricula. On the other hand, writers with a particular association with popular genres such as horror or science fiction, such as Mary Shelley, Bram Stoker, Robert Louis Stevenson and H. G. Wells, have been the subject of endless adaptations into comics and other media. Scott has disappeared from the curriculum for various reasons, and is seen by some as quite unfashionable. The popularity of Scott in the *Classics Illustrated* series indicates that Scottish themes, and the author's appropriation of British myths and folktales, suited the tastes of American readers. The medieval imagery and gothic themes were certainly popular, and these comics fulfilled the remit of making texts that seem inaccessible easier to approach. The length of many of Scott's works make them a daunting prospect for some. However, as Scott has retreated further from the curriculum there has been less of an appetite to adapt his works into comics. The

²² Jones Jr., *Classics Illustrated*, p. 204.

Classics Illustrated stories offer fascinating glimpses for the potential for adaptations of Scott. But as Alison Lumsden notes, there is danger when illustrating Scott, whose reputation has become one of a Romantic idealist, in missing much of the irony of his work and the pointed questions he asked of his readers:

At its best the art work produced, for example by JMW Turner, captured the subtle relationships between place, memory and imagination at play in his work. At its worst, illustration reduced Scott to a set of romantic clichés. To take one example, in a famous scene from *Waverley*, Flora MacIvor, sister of a Jacobite highland chief, seduces Waverley to the Jacobite cause by singing to him by a waterfall. In the novel the scene is highly staged and highly ironic and a careful reader will note that if they too are seduced by the romantic image offered here, they are as foolish as the rather hapless hero Waverley. But later illustrations of this scene, particularly in children's editions, have none of Scott's irony. The episode inevitably becomes simply an iconic romantic highland image.²³

Of course, this is a danger for the comics creators too, who run the risk of simplifying the story to such an extent that such subtlety is lost. In this regard, Scott has been ill-served by adaptation generally. However, as argued above, many, though not all, of the comics adaptations have been in dialogue with Scott, and his concerns – and in some cases proved to be very successful in terms of the entertainment and education they offered to readers.

²³ Lumsden, "Walter Scott was no bland tartan romantic, he was dumbed down".